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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUSHANBE 001151

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: RUSSIAN DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER ASKS ABOUT U.S. MILITARY IN
TAJIKISTAN AND NORTHERN AFGHAN SECURITY SITUATION

CLASSIFIED BY: Ken Gross, Ambassador, EXEC, State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin asked Ambassador whether the United States was becoming directly involved in security on the Tajik-Afghan border, saying this would be a very sensitive development for Russia. Ambassador outlined our security cooperation with Tajikistan and said we did not have or plan any U.S. forces involved directly in securing the border. Ambassador offered to brief the Russian ambassador in Dushanbe on our border security programs in Tajikistan. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Karasin, in Dushanbe for a meeting of Russian Ambassadors in Central Asia, invited Ambassador to meet at the Dushanbe Hyatt on October 16. Karasin, accompanied by Russian ambassador to Tajikistan Yuri Popov, wished to discuss Russian and U.S. security concerns in Central Asia and to know whether the United States was placing military or other armed forces on the Tajik-Afghan border. Karasin said the idea for discussing the security situation with the Ambassador arose from a dinner meeting in Moscow with Under Secretary Burns.

¶3. (C) Karasin commented that the security situation in northern Afghanistan was fluid, and he was concerned that there might be "real threats" from northern Afghanistan. He asked what U.S. security interests were in Tajikistan. Ambassador replied that the United States focused on helping Tajikistan improve its border security to stem the flow of narcotics northward and to prevent militant groups in Afghanistan from using Tajikistan as a haven. Acknowledging that Russia viewed Tajikistan's border with Afghanistan as an extension of its own border, Karasin wanted to know whether the United States had border security trainers permanently based in Tajikistan and whether U.S. trainers were conducting their activities in border regions or only in Dushanbe. Ambassador explained that the United States brought occasional training teams, but did not operate a permanent training facility or have a training team based here. He briefly outlined U.S. and OSCE training activities, all of which Karasin seemed unaware. Ambassador also described our activities at the bridge and Nizhny Pyanj.

¶4. (C) Karasin said keeping Russian border guards or advisers "in whatever form" in Tajikistan was important for Russia. He asked whether the United States was sending forces to secure the Tajik-Afghan border, saying this would be a "very sensitive matter." Karasin urged close cooperation between the United States and Russia in Tajikistan and an open exchange of information on security interests and activities in the region, commenting that the Tajiks played Russia and the United States

against each another. "When it is a game, let it be, but when it touches our national security interests, we need to be more serious." Karasin said that in our capitals Russian-U.S. relations were becoming more transparent and asked for greater transparency at the local level too.

15. (C) Ambassador offered to give a briefing to Ambassador Popov on U.S. border security activities in Tajikistan. Karasin thanked Ambassador for this offer and agreed it would be useful.

He commented that Russia's overriding interest in Central Asia was stability and good regional relations and that Tajikistan and Uzbekistan had chronically bad relations. Russia was trying to improve Uzbek-Tajik relations through various regional fora, but the problems were largely personal between Rahmon and Karimov. He said Russia's long term interest in the region was "development, development, and development" which should take place in a "predictable and soft way."

16. (C) Continuing, Karasin said the Russian Defense Minister would arrive in Tajikistan on October 16 to discuss the future of Russia's 201st military base. Karasin hoped the Tajiks would see the presence of the 201st as positive for both Tajikistan and Russia, as a deterrent to any potential threats to Tajikistan, and commented that Tajikistan's security was also vital for Russia's security.

17. (C) Comment: There are various signs of trouble in the Tajik Russia relationship, including the recent Tajik language law which downgraded the status of Russian in favor of Tajiki,

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long-running unhappiness over the ownership balance in the Sangtuda-1 hydropower station, and the falling out between Russia and Tajikistan over the Rogun Dam project. There has been much discussion in local media lately of Tajikistan's interest in having Russia pay rent on its military bases in Tajikistan. It is possible that the Tajiks have hinted to the Russians of greater U.S. military involvement in Tajikistan in order to get more concessions from Russia on the base payment or other issues. If that is true, that would explain Karasin's interest in our security related activities here. And the Russians may be giving credence to recent press reports that mischaracterized our ongoing Counter Narco-Terrorism training as a new deployment of U.S. special forces to Tajikistan and elsewhere in Central Asia. The Deputy Foreign Minister raising the issue suggests they take seriously whatever (mis)information they have. Further cooperation and openness in the U.S.-Russian relationship in Tajikistan is in both countries' interests, and we welcome Karasin's overtures. We note, however, that Russian cooperation has its limits - After inviting us to come for coffee, Karasin stiffed us for the bill at the Hyatt restaurant.

End Comment.

GROSS